A review of Da Rold, Orietta, and Elaine Treharne (eds.), Textual Cultures: Cultural Texts. Essays and Studies Collected on Behalf of the English Association

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"Nobody reads journals, [...] People read papers," said the science publisher Vitek Tracz in an interview in October 2013, predicting an end for traditional peer-reviewed academic journals within the next ten years. Even though he was concerned with the future of printed journal, the observation also casts light on how scholars read research. The high degree of specialisation and demand for publish-or-perish, which characterise today's academic world, can lead to a certain kind of tunnel vision: scholars only have time for articles which are relevant for their topic.

Tracz did not mention collections of essays published in book form, important in the humanities, but it seems possible that electronic publishing might, in the long run, spell the end of them as well. This is a pity, since publications like *Textual Cultures: Cultural Texts* (2010), edited by Orietta Da Rold and Elaine Treharne, demonstrate that essays in which the common denominator is fairly broadly defined and which approach their topic with a number of different interpretative approaches can offer insight and inspiration to scholars across the narrow boundaries of their personal research interests.

The volume collects into the same covers essays that centre "on the text (manuscript, metaphor, writing, code)" (Treharne 2010: 1) in its material and cultural context. The time period covered is very long, starting with Anglo-Saxon England and Byzantium and finishing with born-electric texts of the 21st century. What unites the essays, according to the editors, is their strong emphasis on the material context, and that they are A) innovative, and B) methodologically rigorous (Da Rold & Treharne 2010: 2).

The essays can be divided in four categories: two essays offer a comprehensive assessment of scholarship related to a certain topic, four focus a single codex, which combine codicology with looking at the textual content and historical context, two approach their subject with more of a literary studies approach and two focus on bibliography. I will discuss the papers in this order (the grouping is mine. It is not used as an organising principle in the book).

The first group includes an article by Da Rold (43–58), one of the editors, which contains a preliminary overall assessment of manuscript production between 1100 and 1400, based on her experiences on working with two projects *The Production and Use of Manuscripts 1060 to 1220* and *A Catalogue of Vernacular Manuscript Books of the English West Midlands*. The period has received considerably less attention in the new codicologically focused studies than the Old English period and the 15th century, even though it prefigured many of the developments of the late Middle Ages. It was during these centuries that manuscript production spread from monasteries to university and commercial production of manuscript books emerged. Da Rold brings up many valid points, criticising what she calls compartmentalisation of the study of Middle English and literary texts, and emphasizing that Middle English should be studied in its manuscript context, taking into account Latin and Anglo-Norman, as well as religious, scientific and utilitarian texts, since it is normal to find all mixed in the same codices. She also calls for qualitative analysis based on quantitative analysis of all available data, which is enabled by new digital tools, pointing out that even though manuscripts from this period have been catalogued, they have not been analysed with the latest codicological methodologies. The article naturally asks more questions than it

answers, but the questions it asks are very compelling ones, including who were the scribes who copied these manuscripts and for whom were they copied? Were they trained in monasteries, universities or through a guild system? And how do we think we know? Since Da Rold is one of the editors, this essay very likely sheds some light on why this collection of essays was compiled.

The other article that contains a review of scholarship is by A.S.G Edwards (59–73). It summarizes scholarship and attitudes towards the Ellesmere manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Edwards starts with a summary on the known facts on the genesis and early provenance of the manuscript, followed by an account of the editorial and scholarly history of the manuscript. He also touches upon the debate, which one is more authoritative the Ellesmere or the Hengwrt manuscript, raising the rather amusing point that British and Harvard scholars have favoured the lavishly decorated, aristocratic, Ellesmere, whereas ones placed in the American Mid-West have preferred the humbler Hengwrt (2010: 67). The essay functions as a good summary on the scholarship on the Ellesmere manuscript. It is likely to helpful to anyone working with Chaucer and the Ellesmere manuscript, providing him or her with an up-to-date bibliography. However, it can be questioned to some extent, how much new information the article produces.

One of the most important developments in recent years has been a renewed interest in codices as items and studies which examine texts in their manuscript context, taking into account the physical form, the textual content, marginal comments, known provenance and historical context. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is where the strongest focus in the book lies. Four articles in the volume approach a single manuscript with the type of detailed qualitative analysis, which was mentioned by Da Rold in her essay.

The contribution by Erika Corradini (5–19) discusses late Old English composite manuscripts of homilies, in which homilies originally written, for example, by Aelfric or Wulfstan have been modified by adding new parts and modernising their orthography. The manuscript subjected to most detailed analysis is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 421. Julietta Crick (21–42) examines Exeter, Cathedral Library 3514, a 13th-century *de luxe* codex containing historical chronicles and genealogical material, which she argues is originally Welsh, despite of containing Anglo-Norman texts in addition to Welsh ones. Hanna (141–161) focuses on the Lollard manuscript, Oxford Bodleian Library, Bodley 647, and re-examines its importance for the Lollard movement, by taking into account its booklet structure, dialect, as well as marginal comments. Finally, Liberty Stavanage, in a very interesting paper (201–215), studies the York register, containing the York cycle plays. Stavanage shows in her analysis that the manuscript is a master copy kept by the city of the performances given by various guilds and that the text of the plays was continuously updated. This has left a wealth of material in the form of modifications and marginal comments, which Stavanage links to competition for influence between the city of York and Guilds.

In addition to focusing on a single manuscript, these studies have a number of other similarities. They all, in a very practical move, include the majority of codicological details in appendices, which makes the running text more readable. They also follow the standard approach of making arguments on the likely and possible scenarios for production circumstances of these manuscripts based on comparing the codicological features to their historical context. Inevitably, some of this is, while being based on codicological and historical facts, is speculation. Moreover, the approach to textual contents of the manuscripts is not based on any explicitly

stated linguistic methodology. Rather the textual contents are only treated by what could be called 'common-sense historical observations'. Crick in her article refers to a study by Stodnick, which combines discourse analysis and codicology in the analysis of Anglo-Saxon genealogical lists, but she does not make use of discourse analysis herself.

One of the articles does offer a methodological contribution. This is a very long 45-page article by Foys and Tretien (75–120), which contains an analysis of Beowulf and the Diary of Samuel Pepys with an approach they call "deep media" studies (78) and a critique of the digital editions of these two canonical works. The approach, originally developed by Zielinski (1996), involves considering texts in the context of "media ecology" of the period, "drilling down to a specific moment and studying forms of media that did not survive or immediately influence present media forms" (76). Foys and Tretien quote at length from research into Beowulf and Pepys, and offer short historical accounts on the significance of runes in Anglo- Saxon England and shorthand in the 17th century. They argue that despite being very flexible the digital editions of these works are descended from printed editions that preceded them and like these editions they ignore features part of the original media, in the case of Beowulf Germanic runes, which are expanded silently with only a footnote, and in the case of Pepys his use shorthand, a system commonly used in the day.

A second article, which approaches its subject more from a literary-studies point-of-view, is by Romanchiuk on the use of heart as a literary thrope in Byzantine texts. Its approach in grounded more in literary studies or could simply be called 'medievalist'. Romanchiuk argues that Byzantium and Eastern Christianity have been overlooked in book history, and supports his points by quoting passages from literature, analysing how the word heart is used as a metaphor for learning and learnedness in them. The article is a worthy contribution, bringing into account areas which are not central to the thinking of Anglicists in particular. However, its approach which involves quoting individually picked examples is, of course, far from comprehensive.

Finally, the collection also contains two articles which address bibliographical description. The contribution by David L. Gants (121–140) discusses the bibliographical description of digital texts. Gants applies tools of analytical bibliography by Fredson Bowers (1949), and asks how it is possible to describe electronic texts comprehensively and satisfactorily. The article contains three examples on bibliographical descriptions of digital resources, one from the 1980s, *Mindwheel* (1985), one from the 90s, the *Oxford Electronic Text Library edition of Riverside Chaucer* (1992), and one which was originally released in the 1996, but has been continuously updated: *The William Blake Archive*. The article is short, but to the point, and the model descriptions are likely to be useful for anyone who needs to make a bibliographical description of a digital resource of historical texts.

Smith, in contrast, discusses the use of red as a textual element in early printed books (187–200), a subject which has been extensively discussed in manuscript studies, but left to little attention in research into early printed books. She aims to fill this gap by applying latest codicological theory into the description of incunabula. It also includes a case study of the copies of one book: *De moral lepra* by Johannes Niderin (1470). The study is relevant, of course, and it is interesting to note that a visual code which had a continuous development from manuscripts to printed books has been treated so differently in different research traditions. However, I could not avoid the feeling that the phenomenon itself belonged to a

fairly short transition period. As Smith herself notes, red was only used in the first decades of printed books and was replaced by new ways for indicating the same textual hierarchies in the 16th century.

To sum up, the book brings into same covers essays which examine texts in their physical and cultural context, with a number of different methodologies, including codicology, deep media studies and bibliography. It offers an excellent cross-section on where textual scholarship is at the time being, when the focus has shifted from textual scholarship to the material side of books and transferring resources to digital format. Manuscript studies are currently a very exciting field, with all the new possibilities provided by digital tools and resources. Making a full use of them will depend on a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, which will allow us to write the history of the book with an unprecedented level of empiricism. However, making full use of these tools and resources will also depend on excellent collections of essays like this one, which collect various time periods and approaches in the same covers.

Because of the varied approaches and the long time period, it is very likely that many scholars will end up reading only individual articles. This is a shame, because compartmentalisation is a real danger in today's academic culture, and not only in the way the study of Middle English is removed from Anglo-Norman and Latin, as was mentioned by Da Rold in her article. To take two examples, manuscript scholars and incunabula scholars can have completely different terminology for discussing the same phenomena, as is mentioned in the article by Smith. Moreover, a field like analytic bibliography should be of importance for scholars who work with manuscripts and their desciptions whether it is in digital format or in a traditional one.

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